

REPORT OF SOCIETY MEETINGS RESTORATION OF THE PAOLOZZI MOSAICS AT TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD STATION

by Mike Ashworth, Heritage Manager, London Underground Limited

**A report of the Society meeting held at All Souls Clubhouse
on Tuesday 11 October 2016**

Originally, this talk was to be presented jointly with Polly Wright of *Art on the Underground (AoU)* but she has now left LUL's employment.

The concept both of commissioned art and graphic design forming an inherent part of station design was first proposed in the 1930s as part of the New Works schemes. However, the only items commissioned were 'The Archer' at East Finchley station and Ervin Bossányi's stained glass windows at Uxbridge. Economic pressures created by the 1939-45 War meaning that other plans were prevented from coming fruition. These plans (several of which reached design stage, and Mike has seen the sketches) included a statue of Dick Whittington for Highgate station; and Gertrude Hermes' etched glass window of Britannia which was intended for Newbury Park or another station on the Central Line extension.

In the 1960s the Design Research Unit worked extensively on the design of the Victoria Line and developed the strong station based theme of the seat recess panels (each station designed by a well-known artist or designer) as well as the 'Black Horse' sculptural panel at the station of that name by McFall and Drescha. In the mid/late-1970s, with the control of LT passing back to the Greater London Council (GLC), funding was released to refurbish a group of mostly central area tube stations that were in urgent need of 'TLC'. Working with the LT Architects' department, the scheme was based on giving an individual and distinct feel for each station and around twenty sites were subject to some varying level of work. Examples included murals on the platforms at Charing Cross: the Northern Line platforms designed by David Gentleman and feature scenes from the history of the 'Eleanor Cross', whilst the Bakerloo platforms murals would be based upon pictures on display in the nearby National Gallery. Mike was pleased to confirm that Gentleman murals are an inherent part of this station and will not be moved or destroyed, and indeed recently LU has been undertaking a survey of all such examples of station décor with a view to developing a stronger policy regarding potential retention and management of such design features.

Although the 1970/80s schemes do deliver a very individualist feeling to stations they can have disadvantages. For example, they often impact on or reduce the space available for (revenue raising) advertising.

Tottenham Court Road Station opened in 1900 as part of the Central London Railway. The stations on the CLR were all designed by Harry Bell Measures and featured exteriors in glazed faience (of which Chancery Lane (disused entrance), Oxford Street (Argyle Street corner), Queensway and Holland Park survive), with tiled interiors, at platform level largely in a white glazed tile. In 1907, the 'Hampstead Tube' (The Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead Railway – now part of the Northern Line) joined the Central at the station, although at the time, their station was named 'Oxford Street'. The combined station became known as Tottenham Court Road on 9 March 1908 to avoid passenger confusion.

In the 1920s the station saw major changes. By 1925 a new subsurface ticket hall, and escalators serving both lines had been constructed and the lifts were abandoned. At platform level, no real changes to the 1900/1907 finishes took place apart from steady installation of 'roundels' in the pre-WW1 period, post-WW2 enamel frieze plates and the 'New Works Programme' Central Line platform extensions. Equally at ticket hall level there were not many changes, apart from a reorganisation to allow more ticket machines to be installed in the late-1970s.

Eduardo Paolozzi was born in Leith (Edinburgh) in 1924 and had achieved a significant reputation as an artist by the time London Transport commissioned him. His "Pop Art" murals at Tottenham Court Road are unusual as they are not just-linear, but also run up and onto the ceiling and also were present in all areas of the station, not just at platform level. This included the 'Exit 1' site on Oxford Street, the

upper escalator portal at ticket hall level, both Central and Northern Line platforms and with significant areas of mosaic at interchange level – most notably the ‘rotunda’ created within one of the abandoned CLR lift shafts. This makes the extent of the works unique in terms of the LU art programme seen at other stations.

The subject of the mosaics are those of the surrounding area – primarily Soho and the associated nightlife this part of the city was and is so well known for. In design terms, the Northern Line mosaics are more geometric and less colourful than those on the Central Line. Mike theorises that the project and therefore Paolozzi ran out of funding and time after delivering the Central Line murals, and so the former are more ‘basic’, being in simpler colours and more abstract. It is also the case that Paolozzi may have ‘moved on’ artistically during the sketching and design of these murals – also, Duncan Lamb (the then LT Architect) had more input into the Northern Line areas and this could be reflected in these areas. Mike confirmed that one frequent misconception is regarding the ‘butterflies’ in the design – they are actually ‘moths’, reflecting the night!

The recent works to the station fulfil two purposes – firstly, congestion relief at a station that was ‘straining at the seams’ and also to allow for the opening of the new joint station with Crossrail (now the Elizabeth Line). The nature and extent of these major works were recognised as having significant impact on the murals at an early stage of planning. This included complete demolition of surface and ticket hall level structures and significant works on both platforms involving relocation of existing features (including staircases) and new works such as additional staircases and lifts.

Interestingly, the murals are not ‘listed’ by English Heritage but LU recognised that they are the custodian of something very significant and they should be treated as if they were listed and this proved the starting point for conversations and panning regarding the works. Although Mike conceded that these murals are very much the “Marmite” moment of the Underground – you either love them or hate them – for everyone who wanted to keep them there was a significant number of people who would not have been unhappy to lose them! Another thing that Mike has noticed is that, arguably, the murals look best when viewed from a distance but, he certainly, does not advocate getting down on the track to test this idea! He did wonder whether the original idea was to install them on the opposite trackside wall that would have given an ‘at distance’ view but that would have lost one of the unique features of the murals in that the public can get very ‘up close’ to the artwork and material on the platform walls.

When fitted, and following Paolozzi’s sketches and designs, the complex areas of the murals were prepared off-site, fitted to the walls and then the background areas were added as individual tiles onsite. The materials are both glass ‘tesserae’ as well as ceramic elements and they were made, fittingly, in Italy using very traditional methods.

Once the decision had been made to retain as much as was possible planning works began around 2009. The works were undertaken closely with Hawkins Brown (the architects for the new works), specialist conservation and tiling contractors (including some people who had actually worked on the original scheme in the early 1980s), and with the Eduardo Paolozzi Foundation Trust, who are responsible for the moral rights associated with his works and the various archives he bequeathed since his death in 2005. For example, where murals had to be removed and relocated at platform level LU had to understand the continuity and context of that particular section of the mosaics, to ensure that they did not introduce or incorrectly reinterpret the underlying artist’s intentions and for this the knowledge of the Paolozzi Foundation proved invaluable.

Initially, a photographic survey of all the mosaics was undertaken which revealed that many pieces were missing and that many of those which were there, were incredibly dirty. Overall, of the sections that had to be physically removed, about 75% to 80% of the individual tesserae have been salvaged and reinstalled. Given the actual extent of accidental loss this was a better figure than had been hoped for. New tesserae have been sourced from the factory in Italy which made the original tiles. This proved to be a very complex task as production methods and material have changed in recent years and so extensive sampling of proposed replacements, in terms of colour, texture and lustre, was required. An early decision was to decide where the project would either blend together ‘old’ and ‘new’ tiles to make a seamless transition or if old or new would be grouped where aesthetically this looked more coherent and pleasing.

One of the most complex and contentious areas of the works were the tripartite arches above the escalators. Here, the murals were not attached to a solid wall from which they could be removed using

standard conservation techniques and so LU knew they would be unable to remove and reassemble these in any meaningful way on site. Equally, artistically, as the arches themselves were to be completely demolished as part of the works they felt that any attempt to recreate this assemble in the new ticket hall would not be 'faithful' to the original design or the new space.

Due to the construction of the arches, we knew that, like a spider's web, they would be unstable to the point of collapse during demolition. Contrary to public 'belief', it was never the intention to simply dispose of the fragments but finding a meaningful home for them was not easy. Various institutions rejected them but after long discussions, The University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh College of Art – where Eduardo had been a lecturer) have taken the fragments. They are now undertaking a major 'hands on' restoration project, working across under-graduate disciplines, to identify and clean each piece, commissioning replacements where necessary due to irreparable damage, and the mosaics will, eventually, be reconstructed and put on display within a new building at the University within 3 to 4 years.

The other major sections of the mosaics away from platform level were the 'rotunda' at the base of the escalators and the 'Exit 1' mosaic panel. The former has simply been cleaned and repaired having been protected during the construction phase. The latter has proved more of a challenge as the whole original CLR station building, upon whose walls the panel sat, was being demolished as part of the works. Again, there was sadly much misconception about LU's intentions for this piece as they had always insisted on complete removal and relocation, to professional conservation standards. This was achieved – by carefully shrouding the work, sawing it off the wall as a complete section and then mounting it onto a lightweight aluminium frame. LU carefully chose its new home, in one of the newly constructed Central Line access passageways and it is now happily installed in its new home, having required only a careful clean and a new green tile border. The interesting part of this element of the works was lowering the entire panel and new frame down one of the new lift shafts before the lift was fitted – timing this work was something the project had to carefully choreograph – that and safely wheeling the entire package along Oxford Street very early one morning!

The murals were designed, and remain, to be touched and not to be "precious artworks" but to be part of a living station and this has been the over-arching philosophy kept in mind throughout the works. The works have raised huge artistic issue over how major and inherent artworks on such sites as stations are managed when sites such as stations have to be not only maintained but also altered and expanded. Knowing how, physically and philosophically, one can manage amending such artworks is a challenging task, involving many disciplines and professionals and all on the Tottenham Court Road project have risen to that challenge. This has been recognised in the recent award of the 2016 National Railway Heritage Awards for 'craftmanship' to the Project.

Overall, this has been a very expensive conservation project undertaken to tight deadlines and the largest conservation project ever done by LU and arguably one of the largest types of conservation scheme currently underway in Europe. Unexpectedly, it has given LT insight in how to deal with Social Media as a lot of unexpectedly negative, and very often incorrect, opinions were expressed. In future on projects of this nature, pre-emptive press releases and communications fully explaining what is planned would be a good idea. Equally, in terms of wider understanding of how such significant social and public artworks are managed and conserved the Project has proved useful to other schemes – such as the management of the extensive public artworks in Harlow New Town. The Paolozzi works at Tottenham Court Road have been joined by one of AoU's most extensive commissions – the striking graphics in the new ticket hall by French artist Daniel Buren. One of LU's forthcoming projects is at Bank Station (Bloomberg entrance) opening in 2017 which will feature a series of etched glass windows showing the Temple of Mithras, which previously formed part of the Bucklersbury building of 1952/55 that sat on the site of the new Bloomberg building, the owner of which has gifted the pieces to LU. They are by the well-known New Zealand artist John Hutton.

After a period of question and answer, the meeting thanked Mike in the usual manner.

Amanda Griffiths